# New ideas of socialism

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Abstract

This paper discusses attempts to rethink socialism in the light of recent economic, social and political developments such as the rise of neo-liberalism, post-fordism, the demise of state socialism and globalization.

It posits four new revisionist models of socialism - individualist socialism, market socialism, citizenship (or radical democratic) socialism and associational socialism.

It examines each critically, arguing against the first and second models and in favour of the third and fourth. Associationalism, it is argued, provides a means for achieving the goals of citizenship or radical democratic socialism - a participatory pluralist and communitarian socialism.

Associationalism, based on a strong role for associations in civil society and a co-operative polity, is outlined and advocated.

There have been four significant developments affecting traditional conceptions of socialism in recent years - the increasing influence of neo-liberalism in the corridors of political power in a number of countries; the 'post-fordist' diversification of economic and social structures; the collapse of state socialism, East and West; and the globalization of economic, political and cultural life. These have undermined (although by no means displaced) the nation-state and the politics of mass production and consumption and class. They have exposed the redundancy of traditional socialist ideas about the imposition of socialism through the state, central planning and bureaucratic collective provision, whether done in the names of Keynes and Beveridge or of Marx and Lenin. In short they all scold socialism for its statism and they point to non-statist alternatives.

Neo-liberalism, post-fordism, post-communism and globalization have emphasized new roles for non-statist ideas and institutions. They have emphasized a lesser role for the over-powerful central state, a greater role for freedom and diversity, for the market and an increasing emphasis on the importance of democracy.

For some time socialists have been outflanked and left standing by such developments. The Left continued to follow statist and class-centred modes

of thinking in the West, while the state socialist governments in the East seemed oblivious to the moral and practical deficit in their systems of inefficient and oppressive rule from the centre.

However socialists have finally been forced to adopt the anti-statist agenda. One reason for this is that recent anti-statist ideas have connected with a real popular dissatisfaction with the experience of statism and have made statism an electoral liability. Another less expedient reason is that nonstatist critiques and alternatives have exposed a genuine weakness in socialist thought and practice. State socialism, East and West, really has left a lot to be desired. At the least it has been unresponsive to public needs and inefficient in providing for them. At the worst it has been authoritarian, brutal and repressive.

Why, then, the continuing pre-occupation with socialism that the tide of this piece implies? Socialism has a necessary role to play. The failings of socialism have been in its methods (state ownership and central planning, for instance) rather than in its ends (equality, co-operation and internationalism, for example) and once the statist means of socialism are got rid of, there is a lot left that is indispensable. In fact the ends of socialism remain more or less unscathed, if not more pressing than ever.

Socialism has two contributions to make amidst the present ascendancy of pluralism and liberalism. First, there are a number of aims and insights in socialist thought which pluralism and liberalism do not have the conceptual apparatuses to deal with. There are specifically socialist principles which are important but lacking from these other doctrines. Secondly, the achievement of pluralist and liberal objectives is dependent upon certain socialist and collectivist conditions. Without such conditions liberalism and pluralism will be their own downfall. Values and structures of mutual regard, universalism, co-operation and equality are necessary for a liberal and pluralist society, yet not conceivable within an exclusively liberal or pluralist perspective.

Furthermore in a context of nationalism and conflict, dangerous arms stocks, third world starvation and death and ecological crisis, nothing could be more in need than a doctrine which stresses equality, co-operation, internationalism and the public good.

Let me look now at some of the ways that socialists have attempted to escape from old statist forms to new forms of democratic, pluralist and libertarian socialist thinking. There are four redefinitions of traditional socialism that I wish to discuss - individualist socialism, market socialism, citizenship or radical democratic socialism and associational socialism.

## Individualist socialism

The attempt to outdo neo-liberals on the issue of individual liberty has been the concern of some prominent British Labour Party politicians like Roy

Hattersley and Bryan Gould, as well as of academics such as Raymond Plant.
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*What is individualist socialism?*

The argument of these writers is that the traditional concern of socialism - equality -, given a central place most seminally by writers like R. H. Tawney and C. A. R. Crosland,3 is a means of achieving what should be the central objective of socialists - individual liberty. Equality itself is not the end, but merely a stepping stone along the road to achieving liberty, the true goal of socialism.

The liberal theory of liberty is a negative one which sees liberty as the absence of external coercion. The role of the state is to provide the conditions for minimizing coercion, not to impose an externally defined social good on individuals. Socialists, like Hattersley and Plant, go this far but go one step further. They argue also for a positive concept of liberty. That everyone might have negative liberty - freedom from external coercion - does not mean that they all have the resources and capacities to express or realize their freedom in their actions. They may not be able to pursue their intentions freely for lack of the relevant enabling assets. Thus an absence of the resources necessary to act freely is itself a restriction on liberty. In particular an inegalitarian distribution of those resources means that some will have a greater capacity to act freely than others. A condition, therefore, for positive liberty is that resources should be distributed equally so that liberty may be so distributed also. For the socialist libertarians, neo-liberalism fails to theorize the bases for the realization of positive liberty and for its egalitarian distribution. But because their positive theory does take these factors into account, socialists believe that their perspective is better at individual libertarianism than neo-liberalism itself.

In my opinion, the socialist argument, put by people like Hattersley and Plant, reduces the liberal theory of freedom to rubble. However while Hattersley and Plant make a good critique of the liberal theory of liberty and propose a good alternative, their theory is not a sufficient basis for a redefined socialism. It is a good socialist theory of liberty, but is flawed as a libertarian theory of socialism.

There are two main reasons for this, noted by Barry Hindess4 in his critique of the individualist socialists - one to do with the libertarianism of this approach and the other to do with its individualism. Let me briefly run through some of the main aspects of these two problems.

*The problems of individualist socialism: liberty and individualism*

One problem is the undifferentiated priority the individualist redefinition of socialism gives to liberty. There are many freedoms some of which can only be

protected at the expense of others, some of which are more important, and whose hierarchy of importance will vary from time to time and place to place. The undifferentiated idea of individual liberty gives us no way of dealing with this. The idea that individual liberty is *the* priority cannot deal with the fact that there are a large number of liberties amongst which we have to make distinctions and preferences. The individual liberty redefinition gives the impression that a blow for one freedom is a blow for freedom as a whole.

Furthermore it is highly problematic to make a single principle the defining feature of a political doctrine, be that principle liberty or any other. There are many other objectives important to a humane organization of human life, the pre-determined exclusive prioritization of anyone of which will lead to the exclusion of others. This sort of reductionism allows the one superior principle to walk all over a wide range of other important values and needs in society. The ethical basis of any ideology needs to be more pluralist and eclectic than this if it is to face up to the complexity of modem society. Defining socialism as the pursuit of individual liberty commits socialists to defending this principle when it is threatened by other values and priorities, such as the pursuit of equality, social co-operation or justice. There is sometimes a tension between different values - equality and liberty do sometimes threaten each other - and on such occasions choices have to be made guided by a greater open-mindedness and eclecticism of thought rather than by an *a priori* and automatic commitment to one value over another. Individual liberty is not always the most desirable priority in every situation. Sometimes it needs to be restricted in pursuit of another important value.

For instance, it is very difficult to justify the continued freedom of motorists to clog up the atmosphere and jam the roads at great environmental, social and economic cost in the name of their freedom to do so. People are free to move about by whatever means they choose. But in certain situations their freedom to do so needs to be overridden in preference for other priorities which take on a greater significance - environmental considerations or its consequences for the public good, for instance. Defining the doctrine of socialism as the pursuit of individual liberty does not allow socialists to subordinate individual liberty every so often to such other priorities. You cannot reduce socialism to individual liberty. There are other objectives which socialists must have which are excluded by a theory of socialism as a belief in individual liberty and which will sometimes involve overriding this objective.

The second main problem with the attempt to redefine socialism as the pursuit of individual liberty is the individualism of this approach. The commitment to individual liberty is a nominally formal one which resists, in the name of the freedom of individuals from externally defined priorities, even the most good-hearted attempts to impose a preferred shape on society. Given the record of socialism on this score this is a fairly understandable bias. But the problem is that it invalidates any attempt to establish a social good over and above what individuals desire. It intentionally avoids substantive commitments about what society should be like, other than that there should be an

equal distribution of freedom for people to determine for themselves their own good life.

This all sounds very nice until you realize that what it does, in effect, is to let in just another particular substantive vision of society as consisting of the sum total of individuals' preferences, over which individuals have no overall control. In this sense individualism is, in fact, a highly substantive doctrine - one which posits a competitive individualist society immune to overall democratic direction - and it should not be mistaken for an impartial libertarian or democratic alternative to the authoritarian ascriptions of public good doctrines.

Society necessarily always takes a substantive form. The doctrine of individual liberty which is nominally agnostic effectively does have substantive implications. The unintended effect of the individual liberty redefinition of socialism is to allow an individualistic and competitive society, of the sort that should be anathema to socialists, to slip in through the back door disguised as mere formalism. By retreating from a substantive theory of the sort of society desired, in preference for the freedom of individuals to plan their own futures, it leaves the constitution of the shape of society to the competitive interaction of individuals.

It cannot even be claimed, as neo-liberals like to, that the substantive outcome is random or arbitrary rather than the product of a particular view of society. This idea is undermined in reality by the disproportionate influence wielded by particularly powerful actors like big business in the competitive interactions of free market economies.

An individual liberty redefinition of socialism puts above all else the idea that individuals' intentions or definitions of the good should be treated with equal validity and allowed to flower. The problem with this is that all courses of action are judged according to the liberty of individuals to be able to pursue them, and without regard for their consequences or for what is good above and beyond individuals' separate preferences. Public good judgments are seen as an imposition on the freedom of the individual. But the individualist alternative reduces socialism to a purely formal doctrine of individual freedom, without allowing it to say anything about the substantive desirability of the particular paths followed by individuals, which may be more or less desirable according to wider public or social considerations. A wider variety of substantive considerations needs to be brought in to evaluate the consequences of different expressions of individual freedom for other individuals or for public life.

There is nothing paternalistic or authoritarian about arguing for more substantive ideas of what society should be like, or about arguing for a public good. Society necessarily takes a substantive form and not to make a choice about what this should be is as much to make a choice as is the conscious socialist attempt to pursue deliberate priorities. In other words, the apparently libertarian neo-liberal is as much assuming a particular substantive set of arrangements as is the socialist. If decisions are not made about the desirable

shape of society publicly by social interests as a whole then the shape of society will be moulded by a combination of *laissez-faire* and the influence of powerful interests.

Furthermore a substantively committed perspective can formulate a model of social conditions actually facilitative of individual liberty and democracy. Competitive individualism is less a safe haven for liberal and pluralist objectives than a context of co-operation and co-ordination. Co-operative and co-ordinated social relations allow for the protection of diverse individualities by their integration into, rather than marginalization from, democratic structures in which they can stand their corner. Co-ordination can be used to protect and foster pluralism and liberty rather than leaving them to the free-for-all of *laissez-faire.* This need not involve a paternalistic or authoritarian vision because individuals and social groups can be part of processes of democratic co-ordination. Desired prescriptions need not be imposed from above but can be determined through inclusive participatory democratic negotiation.

## Market socialism

### *What is market socialism?*

There is much confusion on the left about the place of markets in socialist thinking. In my opinion the term 'market socialism' has been used far too broadly. It should be used to describe the idea of a market forces economy allegedly compatible with socialist values. But it should not be used to refer to conceptions of socialism in which markets are seen as having a role without being the dominant organizing principle in the economy.

Much of what is normally called market socialism goes nowhere near advocacy of a market forces economy in which economic decision-making is dominated by market considerations. People traditionally written off as market socialists, Alec Nove for instance, are nothing of the sort.5 They do not advocate an economy dominated by market forces. What they advocate is an economy in which markets have a role but are not its defining feature. In fact the degree of central planning, regulation and social ownership proposed by people like Nove makes them traditionalists in many ways and not so far from socialist orthodoxy as many on the left would like to imagine.

People who criticize this sort of thinking, which takes the role of markets seriously, are simply confusing the role, which more or less every socialist economist has quite happily conceded to markets, with market forces liberalism, which is quite another thing.

Real market socialism, on the other hand, envisages an economy driven by market forces yet compatible with socialism. What market socialists like Saul Estrin and Julian Le Grand argue for are worker-controlled enterprises operating in a market forces economy, in other words for 'economic liberalism

without the capitalists', as Hirst puts it.6 They tend to argue that their position is socialist on the rather dubious grounds that the means of production are owned by workers.

Market socialists, to their credit, do attempt to respond to some of the obvious deficiencies of traditional socialism – the over-centralization of state ownership and planning, their undemocratic inefficiency and lack of consideration for the rights of the consumer and the individual. Market socialists combine a critique of these problems with a belief in the fact that markets are not the polar opposite of socialism, but are compatible with it.

Markets, they argue, have distinct informational and motivational advantages. If a good is in heavy demand its price will rise, acting as an indicator of its under-supply and an incentive, in the form of promised higher profits, for producers to respond with increased production. In the case of overproduction, prices fall giving producers the information and incentive to redirect production to other more profitable areas. In these ways markets provide fast and efficient methods of supplying information on consumer demand and a sure way of making certain that producers will respond. They encourage innovation and dynamism because producers have continually to improve their products and efficiency and discover new areas of demand in order to make a profit. Markets involve the distribution of purchasing power to consumers who are able to choose between products and dictate, through their purchasing behaviour, to producers what they should produce.

All this overcomes the inefficiency and unresponsiveness of central state planning and it decentralizes power down to enterprises and individual consumers. In these ways it runs with neo-liberal, post-fordist and post-communist trends, shifting from a statist model of socialism to a pluralist, liberal and individualist one. I do not wish to ditch the whole paraphernalia of the system just outlined. Although I think the role of market forces needs to be diluted by the inclusion of more social and non-market criteria in enterprise decision-making I do think market places and market forces have a role to play in any pluralist and socialist economy, precisely because they do serve the functions I have just outlined. But let me look now at problems with the market socialist model.

### *What is wrong with market socialism and why it is not socialist: need, social objectives and equality*

This raises the question of what remains socialist with such a model, and this is the critical question which has been levelled most frequently at the market socialists.

Market socialists defend the socialist nature of their proposals on two grounds. First, while they are equivocal about end-state socialism, the idea that socialism should be committed to equal outcomes, they are firmly committed to starting-gate equality and they think that market forces are

compatible with this socialist principle. Secondly they argue that the distinction between socialism and capitalism has nothing to do with the role of markets but, rather, to do with ownership of the means of production. They argue that market socialism is socialist because the dominant form of ownership in it is workers' ownership, a non-capitalist and definitively socialist form.

But their claims for the compatibility of the market economy and socialism simply do not stand up. Socialism should be defined by its ends not its means, and as social ownership is a means for achieving socialist goals and not an end in itself then it quite clearly cannot be seen as a factor defining socialism. Ownership of the means of production has always been a means to achieving socialist ends and not an end in itself. Hence it cannot be a defining feature of socialism. Therefore the market socialist defence of their position as socialist because it posits non-capitalist forms of ownership simply does not stand up.

But there are other reasons for rejecting market socialism's claims to there being a compatibility between a market forces economy and socialist values. There are three main socialist values which a market forces economy goes against - production for need, social objectives in decision-making, and equality. On all of these questions market socialism falls down.

First, production for need. Market forces are a poor way of meeting social need because they respond not to need but to consumer demand, which is quite another thing. In the market forces model, demand is conflated with purchasing behaviour which is shaped by unequally distributed purchasing power, otherwise known as 'ability to pay'. Market forces will respond to high levels of demand, but demand is skewed as an indicator of need by peoples' differing abilities to pay. Producers in market economies will not respond to needs which do not get translated into purchasing behaviour because of lack of purchasing power or which get translated unevenly due to differences in purchasing power. In this sense markets are lacking severely in that which they claim as their main strength - responsiveness to the needs of the consumer.

This criticism does not imply simply the imposition of spuriously 'objective' and uniform needs on people regardless of their preferences. If the market cannot facilitate the free undistorted expression by individuals of their own needs this does not mean that their needs should be determined for them from above by the state. Needs can be defined democratically from below through the pluralist social negotiation of diverse interests. There *is* a need for the use of market criteria in enterprise decision-making, and consumer demand should be a factor taken into account in deciding on production priorities. However consumers also need to be empowered on the boards of enterprises and market research needs to be carried out in order to identify needs which are distorted or unrepresented in patterns of consumer market demand. Such mechanisms can be sensitive to the diversity of needs as they are defined by people themselves, resorting to neither the statist imposition of preferences nor the distorted perceptions of market forces.

Market socialists argue that the distorting effect that unequal distributions of purchasing power have on the accuracy with which market forces respond to need can be resolved by redistribution. The problem with this response is that it glosses over the question of how exactly such a huge redistributional task could be achieved and sustained within the context of a market economy whose dynamic is based on the reproduction and accumulation of inequalities. Socialists working within capitalist or market economies have always overestimated the extent to which it is possible politically to intervene and regulate an economy in the direction of policy objectives which are in direct contradiction to the logic of the economic system.

A second problem with market socialism is that market forces foster competition at the expense of co-operation and a regard for 'externalities', social and environmental considerations which are not recorded on the balance sheet. Success or even viability on the market demands such a social myopia. Competitive success and profits always come first, even if there may be different ways of realizing them.

Market socialists reply to this with the rather weak response that they reject the sort of communitarian alternative this criticism implies. This is a weak reply because, in true Hayekian fashion, it creates only one far-fetched communitarian alternative, a monolithic community in which all individuals deny their own individuality for the good of the community. This allows for only two extremely counterposed alternatives - market competition and monist communitarianism. This caricature may resemble the very real experience of Eastern European socialism. But greater co-operation and a regard for externalities need not require such a subordination of the plural to the social as was experienced in this particular case.

Plural interests in society can have greater regard for other interests and the public good without denying their own individuality. It is perfectly feasible for individuals or groups to make compromises with the needs of other groups and the needs of society as a whole and yet still retain much of their individual identity and freedom. It is rather disengenuous to pretend otherwise. And the social good and wider social interests need not be an 'objective', externally or state-defined thing, they can be negotiated and agreed by plural interests themselves in processes of associational negotiation.

Market socialists try to pass off competition onto capitalism arguing that the existence of worker co-operatives in a market economy would foster more community, the idea being that workers would adopt a more co-operative outlook on life through being involved in co-operative production decision-making. More likely, though, is that co-operatives in such a context would foster only an internal sense of community and would be just as subject to sectional self-interests and competitive considerations in external relationships as capitalist enterprises are. There is no reason to suggest that solidaristic sentiments fostered within worker-controlled enterprises will be generalized into a broader solidarism unless there are comparable communal structures also linking enterprises with one another and the wider world.

Another market socialist answer to the 'competition' criticism is that a market economy is perfectly compatible with the existence of co-operative relationships beyond the marketized sector. How far this is actually empirically the case is debatable. Private self-interest is rife in non-market relationships in societies with market economies. Non-market relationships are played out frequently as if they have been commodified or marketized. For instance, economic self-interest, rather than social welfare, is the issue closest to peoples' hearts when they are in the polling booth. In addition consumerism and privatism are central features of family and household life. Even if this were not the case, though, or only the case to a limited extent, it would still leave an economy run according to the principle of competitive self-interest. The economy shapes people's lives to an unimaginable extent. Regardless of the degree of co-operative benevolence exhibited elsewhere in the social system, the exclusive sway of competitive self-interest in the economy is indictment enough.

Market competition breeds successes and losers, high earners and low earners, prosperous and neglected regions. In short it breeds inequality. This is the third factor on which the socialist affectations of the workers' control marketeers collapse. Market socialists have a very equivocal attitude to the question of equality. On the one hand they reject inequality, attribute it to capitalism rather than markets and propose redistribution to overcome it. Yet on the other hand they accept and positively celebrate the inherently inegalitarian nature of market forces.

Attempting to offload the blame for inequality on to capitalism is very misleading. Both capitalism and markets create and reproduce inequality. To point to capitalist inequality only distracts attention from the fact that markets are also inherently and cumulatively inegalitarian.

Market socialists who accept the inegalitarianism of market forces argue on one hand that much inequality is not unjust and on the other that inequality in market economies can be rectified by redistributional measures. On the first point they reject end-state equality on the grounds that it smacks too much of monist communitarianism and because unequal outcomes are not unjust as long as people have all started out the same at the starting-gate. But more egalitarian and social considerations do not automatically imply some sort of monist communitarianism. Egalitarianism is compatible with pluralism. Equality is not the same as uniformity. Furthermore the commitment to starting-gate equality without end-state equality is very problematic. The problem is that what is inequality at the end of one process is inequality at the start of another. It is difficult to decide where a just distribution begins and where it ends. To put it another way, the unequal outcome which is acceptable to the market socialist will inevitably form an unequal starting point in another set of interactions which is not. The unequal end becomes illegitimate in market socialist starting-gate equality terms when it becomes an unequal start.

When they do attempt to argue for redistribution market socialists grossly underestimate the extent to which equality can be legislated or regulated for

within a market context in which the economy is driven by a dynamic which inherently reproduces and accumulates inequalities. They also argue that the market is a lottery in which unequal outcomes, resulting from non-deserving factors, are likely to be balanced out by later unequal outcomes which favour those who were less lucky earlier on. But this does not stand up, because on the basis of an undeserved lucky outcome an actor is put into a privileged economic position which he/she can use to ensure an advantage in later transactions.

One by-product of the inegalitarianism of market forces lies in the fact that inequality subverts positive liberty, the extent to which people have the capacities, resources and abilities to express themselves freely. If a more equal distribution of resources, enabling people to realize their capacity for liberty, is achieved then this has to be something which would give joy to any genuine libertarian as well as to egalitarians because it will have increased the possibilities for liberty to flower in the world as well as increasing the amount of equality in the distribution of liberty. A more egalitarian distribution of the resources needed to ensure the positive expression of liberty generalizes the extent of liberty as well as equalizing it. Equality is a basis for an increase in the *sum* of liberty as well as in its equal distribution. Again, then, on a question on which market socialists claim particular superiority over traditional socialism, that of liberty, they are distinctly lacking in credibility because their preferred system fosters an inegalitarianism which undermines positive liberty.

## Democracy, citizenship and socialism

### *What is citizenship socialism?*

The third new form of socialist thinking which has attempted to respond to neo-liberalism, post-fordism and post-communism has accepted many of the problems with traditional socialism raised by these three influences but has tried to go beyond individualist or market alternatives. This third new idea of socialism - 'citizenship' or 'radical democratic' socialism - has attempted to retain the collectivist and social commitments of socialism but to replace the statist forms they have so far tended to take with more democratic forms. It proposes a non-statist alternative, but one that resorts to the democratization of the public good rather than its replacement by neo-liberal private instrumentalism and market anarchy. Democratization has been a way of restructuring socialism to make it more appealing and adequate, and has even for many become the very substance of socialism, such that, for many now, socialism *is* democratization.

Some socialist democratic theorists, Norberto Bobbio for instance, call for socialism to accommodate itself to liberal democratic ideas and institutions such as parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.7 The basic institutions of liberal democracy, which in places like Britain are in need of radical reform,

have for too long been dismissed by socialists as mere 'bourgeois democracy' and are now widely accepted by most on the Left and so beyond question, in terms at least of their basic initial desirability, that they need no further justification.

What I wish to concentrate on are new theories committed to the democratization of socialism through new forms of decentralization, citizenship and participation which go beyond conventional liberal democracy. I focus on these because they propose more than an accommodation with already existing liberal democratic forms, important as this is. They propose a place for forms of democracy which, while with theoretical and even practical precedent, have been more or less absent from post-war capitalist and socialist societies and are not taken that seriously in mainstream practical political thinking. These latter theories propose a challenge not just to socialism, but also to liberal democracy. Writers like Bowles and Gintis, Dahl, Held, Hirst, Keane, Laclau and Mouffe, Plant, Rustin and Walzer argue for a wide variety of steps ranging from the acceptance of traditional Western liberal democratic institutions, to their radical constitutional reform, to the extension of democracy from the polity into the economy and civil society, through to new radical pluralist, decentralized and participatory forms of democracy.

The right-wing neo-liberal response to the increasingly intrusive role of the state, East and West, into peoples' lives in civil society is to abandon ideas of the common good and collectivism and to roll back the state to the most minimal forms possible. In its place neo-liberals put the individual and the pursuit of private self-interest as the governing principles of economic and political organization. Some of the democratic thinkers above, John Keane for instance, are partly sympathetic to some of these liberal ideas. However the dominant citizenship socialist response to statism is not to abandon public needs and provision in favour of privatization and markets but to bring them under greater democratic control. Democracy as such is seen as 'socialism's best answer to the right'.9 The citizenship socialists are more concerned with democratizing the state and decentralizing state powers into civil society than they are with separating off the state from civil society and minimizing its role.

The new citizenship socialists' arguments, succinctly summarized in *New Statesman* articles by Chantal Mouffe and Michael Walzer,10 call for a greater role for active citizens participating fully and equally in politics to determine the common good. This relies on a version of the positive liberty theory. All citizens should be entitled to an active and equal part in the political governance of their society and should have the citizenship rights and the resources to make this possible. In this sense the new citizenship socialism it is very much an egalitarian doctrine. It is also deeply social and participatory. It depends heavily on the generalization of a sense of 'civic virtue' in society, a culture of commitment to public affairs and political activity.

*Citizenship socialism in perspective*

There are four problems that plague the new citizenship socialism – first, it is difficult to see how the citizenship idea of individual participation is feasible in mass complex societies; second, it is difficult to see how mass participation can be compatible with the dominance of representative democracy in such societies; thirdly, the idea of the common will proposed by some citizenship democrats is potentially a dangerously unpluralist idea; and, fourthly, the citizenship democratic proposals are sometimes still fairly abstract, lacking ideas about the political institutions which could turn them into reality.

*1) Participatory democracy.* One of the problems with citizenship democracy is that it is not clear how the sort of mass participatory democracy it implies is possible in huge and complex advanced industrial societies. Democratic decision-making would have to occur in huge forums in which people could not possibly participate adequately and in which decision-making would be dominated by small groups and driven by passion and intimidation rather than by reason and compromise. Many decisions would have to be made on complex and specialized matters about which most people would be insufficiently knowledgeable to make informed decisions.

*2) Representative democracy.* It is also not clear what the role of representative democracy, the dominant political institution in many of the advanced industrialized societies, is in all this. Representative democracy would seem, on the face of it, to be anathema to the participatory ideas of the citizenship democrats as it involves decisions being made by a rather exclusive club. In a representative democracy the political participation of the individual is, in the very nature of the system, restricted. The essence of representative democracy is that authority is given to a party to rule, and to the people to remove it. What is not involved is rule by the people themselves. Representative democracy is a response to the demands of mass society and citizenship democracy has to come to terms with how active participation is to work in the context of representative structures which are not conducive to widespread active citizenship.

*3) The common will.* Another problem is that citizenship democracy has to shed or reformulate its commitment to a common will. In large complex societies, run through with plural divisions, differences and fractures, it is impossible to conceive of the possibility of a common will, arising spontaneously from the people as a whole and shared by them all. The idea of the general will arose in pre-modern times in the face of absolutism and before the days of mass nation-states when small republics or city-states could make some claim to an internal homogeneity, although even in these cases such a claim was rather dubious and based on the exclusion of large sections of the population from citizenship. Modem societies are just too complex and pluralist to sustain a common will. The idea of a general will more often than not means majoritarian democracy and the suppression of minority interests and needs. The general will is more often than not a mythical construct, an

imaginary community, which is insensitive to, and suppresses, real diversity and pluralism. The idea of the peoples' will has been most notoriously invoked by fascism and state socialism. In both cases horrific deeds have been carried out in its name and dissidence brutally suppressed in order to sustain the myth. But where there is pluralism, as there always is, even in the small republic and the city-state, democratic structures are needed which do not suppose a common homogeneity but which place liberal checks on the power of democracy in the hands of a majority and make democracy responsive to pluralism and diversity.

Large complex societies are governed according to the principle of minimal political participation, the representation of difference in multiple parties and the accountability of government to the people rather than its conflation with them. Citizenship democrats have to work out a way of formulating the idea of active citizenship so that it is not geared towards the idea of a general will, but towards a conception of complex plural interests amongst whom shared compromises can be negotiated. Pluralism does not rule out the possibility of agreed overall social priorities, but it does rule out the idea of a single will of society.

*4) Political institutions*. The question that arises from these observations is what are the political institutions appropriate for a participatory citizenship democracy? If existing representative institutions are not up to making space for greater participation, then what institutions are? Some of the citizenship socialists support the British Charter 88 campaign for proportional representation, a bill of rights, a written constitution, devolution and such like. But while these are important and worthy proposals they do not really connect with, or help to concretize, ideas of active citizenship and participation. They are more oriented towards individual citizenship rights, than towards active participation, the common will or civic duty. Charter 88 is concerned with the reform of existing liberal-democratic political institutions. It does not attempt to break out of the liberal democratic paradigm or address the limitations of representation as such, or the institutional forms appropriate to an alternative participatory model of democracy.

On the whole the citizenship theorists are working on a fairly abstract level and their answers to questions about concrete institutional arrangements are vague. Their abstract calls for a citizenship democracy are aimed largely at maintaining the credibility of collectivism by arguing for a shift from statism to democratization rather than to the market or privatization. This is a worthy project but it has yet to broach some of the concrete proposals required of it. It is understandable that at this stage the way forward has had to be mainly in sketching some outline theoretical bases for further development. Many of the citizenship devotees are attempting to rescue concepts from republican traditions of political thought in order to find a language for their new approach. However it is also understandable that critics like Alec Nove and David Miller see, with some justification, concepts like 'democratic collectivism' as no more than slogans. 12

*Citizenship socialism and associational democracy*

There are two ways in which associational democracy can provide the institutions appropriate to the participatory communitarian democracy envisaged by the citizenship socialists. First, associations can provide forums for the active popular participation of individuals in politics at accessible decentralised levels. Second, corporatist concertation between associations can provide a mechanism through which interest groups can participate in government and pluralistically negotiate a 'common good', co-operation be fostered amongst them and pluralist, inclusive and non-statist forms of planning and co-ordination be enabled. These are the two prongs of associationalism - a strong role for voluntary associations in a pluralist civil society and an inclusive corporatist polity comprised of associations representing the plurality of interests in society negotiating agreed social priorities.13 Let me discuss these points in more detail.

One possible answer to the question of the institutions appropriate to a more participatory democracy might be greater decentralization - functional or territorial. Functional decentralization can take place through the devolution of decision-making over particular functions - certain industries or the arts or higher education - to bodies specifically responsible for those functions. I mention the arts and higher education as examples because these are areas in which there already is some functional decentralization of powers in many countries. Territorially decentralization could be down to regional or local government. Decentralization can bring democracy down to more small-scale and local levels at which citizens can participate more fully and with a greater knowledge of the affairs being discussed. Assuming that participation is *desirable* it will be necessary to come up with concrete suggestions about forums in which it is *possible,* particularly given that in large-scale complex societies the idea of mass participatory democracy and active citizenship seems, on the face of it, to be problematic.

A key problem with decentralization concerns the question of how decentralized units can be integrated into mutualist relations to prevent a decline into particularism and instrumental group self-interest and ensure economic efficiency and viability. Larger scale co-ordination might necessitate a continuing role for representative democracy. But I would argue also for corporatist arrangements in which decentralized units can negotiate co-ordinated strategies and co-operative relationships amongst themselves rather than deferring such matters to an external and exclusive representative body.

Another problem raised by the idea of citizenship democracy is that it is predominantly individualistic in its understanding of agency even though it is strongly oriented around the negotiation of a common good. The problem with individual participation is that individuals themselves can have only an extremely limited input into decision-making, whether in representative or participatory democracies. It is only where participatory democracy takes

place in very small-scale contexts that individual participation is possible on a meaningful scale.

The way to overcome this problem and give individuals an influence is through their organization into shared interest associations. Such associations can be given a formal institutionalized role in corporatist political forums.

This should not replace multi-party representative democracy but supplement it. For all its faults representative democracy does ensure some sort of accountability of governments to the electorate that puts a restraint on dictatorial behaviour. Representative democracy is a necessity in a mass society in which possibilities for participation will inevitably be limited yet in which some form is needed to check the power of government and make it accountable. Nevertheless, for all the virtues of such a system, this is no justification for an exclusively representative democracy devoid of associational or participatory forms.

Associationalism permits individuals who are not interested in political activity to wield an influence through collective associations. Furthermore it provides for more functionally decentralized forums whose scale is more amenable to active citizenship and to the participation of those who do wish to participate. The negotiation of the common good by associations would rid us of the idea that there is a uniform will spontaneously existing amongst us all or expressed in some agency outside and above us, be it a spiritual deity or a political administration. The common good in an associationalist context, hammered out by negotiation, would not be one shared by all, nor one that was pre-existing and objective. It would be one that would be reached through compromises between interests in negotiation and resulting from inter-subjective relations, rather than from an objective will. On the other hand it also involves, against liberal individualism, a commitment to an overall public or social good.

Another advantage of a more associationalist form of democracy is that it provides channels - associations and corporatist structures - through which interests can continue to exert an influence on governments between elections. Under representative democracy it is possible for governments to push through legislation against the tide of public opinion without suffering adverse electoral consequences. Representative democracy does not mean that policy-making is going to be sensitive to the great diversity of needs in society between elections. In Britain Mrs Thatcher deliberately decided in her period in power to override the power of plural interests, in a conception of parliamentary sovereignty which stressed the mandate of election and saw the influence of plural interests in between elections as an interference with democracy.

What pluralist pressure there is on governments between elections needs to be expanded and formalized. Party government can be made more responsive to plural needs between elections by the building into representative government of structures of corporatist negotiation. This can be done through the organized consultation of governments with interests in society and

additionally by second Houses of Interests at national, regional and local levels which would not have powers superior to those of first chambers but could throw out legislation from them, force them to consider legislation and act generally as the conscience of a pluralist society in between elections.

### *Community, pluralism and associationalism*

Before concluding let me say a few more words about both the meaning of associationalism and its relationship to socialism. These two questions can be clarified by a brief discussion of the way in which associationalism lies at the intersection of, and attempts to combine, the usually opposed principles of community and pluralism.14

1 have already said that the two key features defining associationalism are, first, a strong role for voluntary associations in a decentralist civil society and, second, mutualist social negotiations between plural associations in an inclusive corporatist state.

An associationalist politics might be similar to that pursued by radical left-wing local authorities in Britain in the 1980s. These authorities fostered an associational culture in civil society through funding and consultation activities. They attempted to build co-operative relations between associations and incorporate them into political life through pseudo-corporatist structures of consultation and co-option on to council committees. There were many problems with 'local socialist' strategies. They were often aimed at mobilizing support rather then devolving power. They were politically selective in the groups they chose to empower. And their pluralist associationalism was often compromised by a contradictory commitment to a hegemonic politics of confrontational vanguardist leadership. But some of the political directions associationalism could take can be seen in their political approach. 15

The two-pronged conception outlined above combines the two too frequently counterposed political ideologies of pluralism and socialism. It provides for a pluralist rather than a statist or too constraining collectivist socialism. Yet it also provides on the other hand for a mutualist and co-operative pluralism rather than one which reacts so far to statist communitarianism that it slides into an unfettered competitive asociality.

Thus associationalism is defined by its combining of pluralism with a co-operative mutualism. The socialism it relates to is one firmly within the pluralist yet co-operative tradition of the doctrine. It provides an alternative to the two major state-centered and over-collectivist traditions which have dominated the history of twentieth-century socialist thought and politics - Western social democracy and Eastern bloc marxist-leninism.

One way of understanding the form of socialism associationalism relates to is to look at the inter-war domination of socialist thought and politics by the rise of bolshevism in the Soviet Union and Fabian socialism in Britain.

Associational socialism corresponds more closely to the tradition advocated by G. D. H. Cole and the guild socialists in that period yet marginalized by the dominance of the other two traditions. 16

It should be noted, incidentally, that socialism is defined here according to values - co-operation and pluralism - and not techniques - central planning or social ownership, for instance. Techniques are means to an end and not the end itself. To identify a doctrine with philosophical objectives with the technical means of achieving them is highly problematic.

What is needed is a co-operative model of social and political organization which offers a pluralistic and democratic alternative to state communitarianism. Yet to retain the co-operative values of socialism it must avoid a slide into the selfish rationality and inegalitarian exploitation of liberal individualism and competitive pluralism. A model is required which combines pluralism and socialism.

Mutualism has to be preserved without monism and pluralism without particularism. But how *do* you foster liberty and diversity without their escalation into parochial self-interest, antagonism and the infringement of the liberty of others? How do you enforce social responsibility and create democratic power without transgressing autonomy or facilitating dangerous accumulations of power?

The answer lies in a third approach, neither statist nor *laissez-faire,* nor one that attempts to conflate or escape from the state or market. The third approach has to be one that manages a reconciliation between these enduring traditional polar opposites, finding a way of combining them and making them live together rather than against one another.17

The concepts of ' pluralist social negotiation' and 'associational democracy' offer tools for thinking through a co-operative pluralist third way. There should be a pluralist society with the maximum possible degree of decentralized freedom and without restrictions on diversity. But this should not be allowed to collapse into an atomistic and uncoordinated competitive sectionalism. Plural and free individuals and groups should pursue their own independent identities and interests in a spirit of social responsibility and mutual regard. While I want to preserve pluralism I want to do so within a social context.

The way to do this is to stand by the idea of autonomous and diverse individuals and interests in society but to integrate them into systems of association and pluralist social negotiation within which they must pursue their own identities and interests in negotiation with others and with a regard for others' priorities.

Associational democracy describes a political structure and system of relations intended to facilitate the pluralist social negotiation of social priorities. Pluralist social negotiation describes the process appropriate to that structure and set of relations. The process is one in which social priorities are negotiated by independent interests interacting in inclusive political structures. These are associational in the sense that the key actors are associations

representing different interests and in that they are combined in associative rather than either opposed or strongly communitarian relations.

Just as associationalism can combine both pluralism and mutualism in social relationships so it can combine, in political relations, democratic power with its accountability and restraint. Constituted by the participation of plural interests associational democracy can from its inclusiveness gain the strength and legitimacy it needs to tackle complex problems. Yet in this same feature power is also diffused and made broadly accountable to diverse interests in a way that puts restraints on its monopolization or abuse in any single set of hands.

Association is quite different, then, from the alternatives. Association means the collection of the diverse. It is the organization, companionship and connection of the many, the loose aggregation of the several. Associative relations are based on partnership which is looser than common mutual identity yet more communal than competition. It describes the common purpose of the diverse. Think of the idea of business associates, for instance, or of the professional association. Such a conception applies both to the idea of the voluntary association as an organization and to the idea of associative relations between such associations in corporatist political forums.

There is no several in the state communitarian model. Here community is the collective without the plural. It is singular and involves the top-down imposition of a false unitary will, the oneness of the many. Strong community is not diversity *and* commonality, but the conflation of the diverse into the common.

The statist dimension of this strong communitarian model goes further. It delivers the common will from above. It disenfranchises interests from deciding together what their interests could be and how a settlement could be reached amongst them all. The state can somehow express, represent and execute externally and from above plural needs as one unified will. Statism adds the vertical coercion of hierarchy to the horizontal coercion of monist communality. It can be seen here how associationalism stands by the co-operative values of socialism. but within a pluralist framework which rejects the statist and over-collectivist way in which those values have been pursued in historical instances of socialist practice.

Yet there is no communality at all in competition. The market involves the striving of the many and diverse for advantage over one another. It gives people their individuality but at the expense of their sociality and solidarism. The competitive market model is pluralism without social responsibility, individualism without society.

Against strong communitarianism, association permits pluralism; against statism it is for democracy through the association of interests themselves; against the market it is for diversity in a co-operative context.

I do not propose associational democracy as an alternative to citizenship socialism. I propose it as a means towards its achievement. In my opinion

general advocacies of active citizenship and a common will are suggestive of something worth pursuing. What is needed is an idea of the political institutions which could facilitate participation and an agreed social good. Otherwise citizenship democracy remains an idea which seems to imply whole national populations crammed into their national parliaments 'participating' in the running of the country on every matter conceivable. Associations can give citizenship socialists the concrete institutions they need to facilitate popular participation and the influence on, or even direct constitutive role in, government of popular interests.

The fact that organized interest groups are so often particularistic and self-interested cannot be a basis for rejecting an associationalist approach. Such undesirable manifestations can be overcome by the integration of associations into structures of pluralist social negotiation through which they can maintain and represent their own distinctive identities but must negotiate with other interests showing due regard for their respective needs and demands. This falls into neither the monism of the common will, nor the atomistic instrumentalism of liberal individualist and competitive pluralist approaches. It allows for a participatory democracy, sensitive to pluralism and capable of mutuality, amenable to some sort of common good but one socially negotiated and sensitive to difference rather than spuriously objective, uniform and imposed.

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## Notes

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2 Roy Hattersley, *Choose Freedom: The Future for Democratic Socialism* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987); Bryan Gould, *Socialism and Freedom* (Macmillan, London, 1985); Raymond Plant, *Citizenship, Rights and Socialism* (Fabian Society, London, 1988).

3 R. H. Tawney, *Equality* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1964); C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (Cape, London, 1980).

4 Barry Hindess 'Liberty and Equality', in B. Hindess (ed.), *Reaaions to the Right* (Routledge, London, 1990).

5 Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1977).

6 Julian Le Grand and Saul Estrin (eds), *Market Socialism* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1989).

7 For example see Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy* (polity, Cambridge, 1987).

8 Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (Roudedge, London 1986); R. A. Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (polity, Cambridge, 1987); Paul Hirst, *Law, Socialism and Democracy* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1986); John Keane, *Democracy and*

*Civil Society* (Verso, London, 1988); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Verso, London, 1985); Chantal Mouffe, 'The Civics Lesson', *New Statesman and Society* (7 October 1988); Plant, *Citizenship, Rights and Socialism;* Michael Rustin, *For a Pluralist Socialism* (Verso, London, 1985); Michael Walzer, *Spheres ofJustice* (Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1983); Michael Walzer, 'The Good Life', *New Statesman and Society* (6 October 1989).

9 Paul Hirst, 'Democracy: socialism's best answer to the right', in Hindess, *Reactions to the Right.*

10 Mouffe, 'The Civics Lesson': Walzer, 'The Good Life'.

11 G. Andrews (ed.), *Citizenship* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991).

12 Alec Nove, 'Response to Boris Frankel's Reply', *Radical Philosophy,* 39 (Spring) 1985; David Miller, 'Why Markets?', in Le Grand and Estrin, *Market Socialism.*

13 Stephen Yeo 'Three Socialisms; Statism, Collectivism, Associationalism', in William Outhwaite and Michael Mulkay (eds), *Social Theory and Social Criticism: Essays for Tom Bottomore* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1987); Walzer, 'The Good Life'; Paul Hirst, 'Associational Socialism in a Pluralist State', *Journal of Law and Society,* 15 (1) 1988; W. Streeck and P. C. Schmitter, 'Community, Market, State - and Associations?', in W. Streeck and P. C. Schmitter (eds), *Private Interest Government? Beyond Market and State* (Sage, London, 1985); John Mathews, *Age of Democracy: The Politics of Post-Fordism* (Oxford University Press, Sydney, 1989).

14 See Streeck and Schmitter, 'Community, Market, State' and Yeo, 'Three Socialisms' for similar attempts to compare and contrast associationalism with other models based on organizing principles such as collectivism, pluralism and the state.

15 For perceptive, balanced and accessible discussions of British 'local socialism' see John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism* (Alien & Unwin, London, 1985) and Stuart Lansley *et al., Councils in Conflict: The Rise and Fall of the Municipal Left* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989).

16 On the history of associationalism see Antony Black's *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Methuen, London, 1984). On the diversity of traditions of socialism and an advocacy of a pluralist co-operative socialism see Anthony Wright, *Socialisms: Theories and Practices* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979). On G. D. H. Cole and the guild socialists see Anthony Wright, G. *D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979).

17 See discussions in David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Polity, Cambridge, 1987), Samuel Bowles and Herb Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (Routledge, London, 1986) and Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond* (Polity, Cambridge, 1989). These try to deal with traditional polar opposites in social and political theory neither by opting for one over the other, nor by attempting to escape the dichotomies but by attempting to manage a compromise between the alternatives.